
A NEW CONCEPT FOR MUSEUM TRAINING IN GERMANY

Dr. Angelika Ruge

To talk about a new concept for museum training seems perhaps, to be a little bit exaggerated. For long time you have all been talking about concepts and contents for museum training and as I figured out the debate on the topic in Germany is as old as the appearance of national museums in the 19th century. Men like Theodor Mommsen, Rudolph Virchow, Alfred Lichtwark, all well known historians and supporters of the museum idea, spoke and wrote not only about the importance of museums as cultural and educational institutions but also supported the idea of professionalisation of museums work. Some of the ideas of our ancestors are still part of an ongoing discussion.

The topic of my talk today will be what kind of personnel a museum of our time needs to cope with the growing demand for internal and external organization. I shall present to you a new training program for museum workers in Germany which aims not to produce a new group of researchers but to prepare students for the practical work in the museum field.

There is no doubt that there will be a continuing need for university trained personnel. The quality and the quantity of students in the humanities who want to work in museums, is large enough to choose the best for leading positions. The director of a museum of a certain size, for example a national museum of art or history, has to be a university trained specialist, a first rate researcher, a highly skilled organization expert and a proven leader. On the second level there are the curators, people interested in research work concerning museum objects and dealings with concepts for exhibitions. Mostly they will lead an unit or a department of a museum. Then you find people in the administration for finance and personnel followed by a variety of specialists, for instance librarians, teachers, technicians and craftsmen.

The new courses of studies of museology set up in Berlin and Leipzig, aim to train those people who assist the researcher, the manager and the director, and are able to deal with the public. Those

people whom we call museologists, a title which has nowadays an international reputation, but which doesn't describe the occupation in a proper manner, have to have a basic knowledge of culture and civilization, they have to be familiar with museum history and ideas. But above that the main part of their curriculum is to learn how to cope with the practical aspects of collecting, documentation, presentation and mediation. The aim of the studies will be to prepare the students for the new tasks of the museum of the future in a more and more internationalized world.

The number and size of museums have been growing in the last decades, which is, as Krysztof Pomian put it, the result of the social process of exchange between the visible and the invisible, between past and future. On an international scale there seems to be no end of this development as the new museum project in Stockholm and the discussions about a museum for contemporary history in France show. A museum is a place of national identity in a secularized world. It seems to become a substitute for religion. The discussions on the permanent exhibition of the recently opened *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* in Bonn and on the exhibition program of the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin are giving many examples for this process. What recently came to my knowledge about a private initiative for a national museum in Athens goes far beyond the traditional idea of a museum. This might be seen if you look at the planning committee which consists of an entrepreneur, a psychologist, a museologist and a designer. In my opinion the future of the museum will have more in common with the ancient treasure-vault than with a museum of virtual realities. The access to the treasure-vault is no longer limited to a few rich and erudite people but is open to all people. Hence the need for mediators in the museum who have to open up the public's understanding of the symbolic beyond the esthetic meaning of the objects.

These remarks attempt to underline the importance of trained museum personnel, well known to all of us. Furthermore they explain the need for a specific kind of museum worker in the field of

organization and mediation. As the budgets for the museums are not growing any more there will be a demand for reorganizing the tasks. Let me explain to you the concept of museum studies recently implemented in the higher education program in Germany and discuss then briefly the opportunities for the students in the future.

At the top of the higher education system in Germany is the university, a place mainly for research and study. It is followed by the technical college (*Fachhochschule*), an institution for study and practical training in engineering, economics, social, work, administration and cultural policy. Here training has a higher importance than research.

After the unification of the former two Germanies in 1990 the educational systems also had to be unified. The study of museology is one of the rare examples that the Federal Republic accepted a course of studies of the former GDR. I think this is due to the intensive involvement of the former GDR in the international museum world and in ICOM. In the former GDR the basis of a professional training was provided by a special professional college in Leipzig, which had a branch in Berlin specially for correspondence courses. In 1990 the museology curriculum was incorporated into the *Fachhochschule für Technik, Wirtschaft, und Kultur* at Leipzig.

In October 1993 the FHTW [Fachhochschule] in Berlin also opened a new course of studies in museology. Museology as a field of study in the higher education system of the Federal Republic of Germany was not known until then. Museum workers had been trained on the job mostly after their university studies which was completed with a doctor's or a master's degree in the humanities. Advanced training was provided by the museum or by the museum associations. Today you are able to study museology in two different places in Germany, in Leipzig and in Berlin.

The four-year syllabus in Leipzig and Berlin are basically structured along the traditional tasks of a museum: collecting, documentation, presentation and mediation. But there are some significant differences which I want to explain to you. Before being

enrolled students in Berlin have to go through a phase of practical work of six months in a museum or a museum related institution such as galleries, antique shops, antiquarian book shops, memorial institutions and so forth. Leipzig accept students without this kind of practical experience. The fifth semester consists of a further phase of practical work which is considered as a link between the introductory courses of the first four semesters and the main courses of two semesters which conclude with a dissertation in the eighth semester. The practical semester is thought of as a first step towards a specialisation in the field of museum work which has to be intensified in the main course of studies. The students in Leipzig have to go through different parts of practical work during their college studies.

The course of studies in Berlin stands in a close relationship to the course of studies for restaurators for archeological and technical objects, a course also opened in October 1993 and wants to build up a close relationship with the course of studies for communications designers, which will start next year. The course of studies in Leipzig has a relationship with the course of studies for librarians and documentarists.

The history of the museum, of objects and of civilization take a main part in the introduction studies. So far there is no difference between Leipzig and Berlin. But in my opinion the following courses are becoming more and more important for the course of studies at the FHTW Berlin: Management and organization, marketing and presentation, sociology, psychology and mediation are subjects of study in the introductional and in the main courses.

The students of museology are going through a language program to meet the international demands in the museum world. They learn to apply and to examine the current media techniques. The pros and cons of introducing computers at the different level of museum work are studied and discussed.

In all parts of the curriculum Berlin is looking for a close relationship between theory and practical work. The staff will consist of five full time professors and approximately ten part time lecturers

from major museums, the administration and freelance experts. Visits to museums, exhibitions in Berlin and outside are part of the curriculum. The third semester will work on collections in museums of Berlin and Brandenburg.

The new course of museology at the FHTW Berlin is a new arrival in the international world of museology program and the youngest member of ICTOP. It is part of college training and not of university training as in most other countries. This decision is an answer to the growing demand for trained people for the museums who have not only to deal with management and finance problems but who have also got to define the position of the museum in society. People will visit a museum no longer to be educated in but to find explanations and identifications for their personal, communal, national and international understanding, explanations which are not available through other media. Museums have to show the exceptional. And for these purposes they have to look for new forms of mediation. The curriculum in Berlin aims at becoming part of this process of reorganisation. We want to achieve this training goal by studying the tradition, reflecting the present and equipping the students with tools for the practical needs of the future. The contents and the structure of the course of studies will be the topic of continuing discussion at the college and in the German museum world. I hope my remarks are opening up a lively discussion and an exchange of experience here and at home.